

Department of Corrections Update on COVID-19 (March 30, 2020)

ST. PAUL – The Minnesota Department of Corrections released the following statement and background information following the first confirmed COVID-19 cases among staff and inmates. Over the weekend, one staff member from MCF-Red Wing and one inmate at MCF-Moose Lake tested positive for COVID-19. Like most people who contract COVID-19, both individuals are experiencing mild symptoms and do not require hospitalization. DOC is providing updates about its response to COVID-19, including updates on inmate testing, on its website: <https://mn.gov/doc/about/covid-19-updates/>.

The department has followed Minnesota Department of Health guidance for quarantine and use of personal protective equipment.

“We have been working directly with epidemiology staff from the Department of Health for several weeks to plan for the known likelihood of staff and inmate cases of COVID-19,” **Commissioner Schnell** said. “We are taking all reasonable steps to minimize the spread with the state’s correctional facilities, and we are implementing methods to protect those most at risk medically.”

“We continue our efforts to balance public health concerns inside the prisons with the need to offer prosocial therapeutic, educational, recreational and phone visiting activities. As an agency, we continue our preventative measures as part of our effort to slow the spread of COVID-19 within the prisons.”

Background on several DOC measures to combat COVID-19

Social Distancing

The DOC is committed to protecting health and safety during this time, while keeping facility programs open for as long as possible and continuing the DOC’s important work to supervise offenders. Programming remains a priority for facility security and stability even during this public health crisis. Minnesota correctional facility and field services leaders have developed and implemented plans to maximize social distancing while maintaining access to programming and continuing supervision.

Visiting Closure

DOC is continuing to limit traffic in and out of the facilities. For that reason, in-person visiting continues to be suspended at all DOC facilities during the COVID-19 outbreak.

Inmates’ connections with loved ones are important to maintain. We have implemented changes to increase access to video visiting. Video visits are paid for by the visitor. Beginning April 1, any person wishing to conduct a video visit with an inmate will be provided one free 15 minute video visit per week. Additional 15 minute visits can be purchased for \$3.50, a rate that is 30 percent lower than the normal cost.

Inmates continue to receive two free 5-minute phone calls per week.

New process for intakes

DOC implemented new processes to limit admissions to only certain facilities and has intensified screening, observation, and isolation protocols for new intakes.

Waive medical copays

DOC waived all medical copays in all facilities. The agency is committed to ensuring that individual economic concerns do not limit an inmate's willingness to seek medical care for flu-like symptoms

Enhanced handwashing and hand sanitizing procedures

DOC installed additional handwashing stations at the entrance to all facilities. Additional hand-sanitizing stations have also been placed at strategic points throughout facilities to minimize cross-contamination between separate living units.

Provided additional bars of soap

DOC distributed extra bars of soap to each facility to ensure a sufficient supply for regular hand washing.

Symptom screening for all individuals entering facilities

All individuals entering DOC facilities are being screened daily for recent travel and symptoms.